

THE  
CLOSING OF THE EXHIBITION

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*Church of St. Stephen*

EXTRACTS FROM A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. STEPHEN, WALBROOK,

OCTOBER 12TH, 1851.

BY

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"I will give thanks unto the Lord with my whole heart, secretly among the faithful and in the congregation. The works of the Lord are great; sought out of all them that have pleasure therein: his work is worthy to be praised, and had in honour, and his righteousness endureth for ever. The merciful and gracious Lord hath so done his marvellous works, that they ought to be had in remembrance."—Psalm cxi., 1st and following verses.

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THE wisdom of the Church has always held the recognition of great public events to be within the province of the pulpit. Superior to the prejudices of the time, separated from the struggles of political life, and by its position commanding the broadest views of causes and consequences, it is amply authorized to record those periods which form the features of history; those contingences which mould the character of nations; and more than all, those illustrations of the Divine benevolence which "vindicate the ways of God to man."

With the last sunset, the Great Exhibition, which has exercised so much rational curiosity, displayed such unrivalled skill, and attracted such continued European interest, has closed for ever. All that will remain of that vast combination of the powers of wealth, the arts of elegance, the contrivances of ingenuity, and the riches of nature, will be memory. It was a brilliant vision, and as a vision it has vanished: but its prospects, its precepts, and even its triumphs, in the shape of national confidence, order, and honour, ought to be imperishable.



When, on passing down those superb halls, containing the noblest specimens of the noblest attribute of man—his intellectual enterprise—I saw those compartments, those treasure-chambers, headed with the names of every kingdom of Europe, mingling with those of the remotest regions—India, China, Africa, Australia, America—I could almost believe that I saw there the representative spirits of the earth, the protecting angels of those great countries, hovering above the scene, assembled to do homage to this country, and to acknowledge the sacred principle of “peace and good-will to man.”

I have alluded to the *confidence* shown in this universal contribution, this deposit of the precious things of earth, this conflux of jewels and gold, poured into the keeping of England. This trust would not be surprising, if it were limited to civilized Europe; but we saw here the tributes of the half-savage races, the Tunisian, the Algerine, the Tartar—men to whose rudeness their treasures must have seemed invaluable—the haughty Turk, the wild African, the suspicious Indian, the jealous Chinese, all with equal reliance giving their riches to the care of men of whom they knew nothing, but that they were the people of a country of honour. With a feeling of national pride, I saw in this act the good faith of the English name penetrating into the depths of the wilderness, and a new memorial raised to the moral glory of England.

A characteristic of this Exhibition which raised it to a higher rank than a national display, was, its being opened by prayer; I believe the first instance of any similar display in Europe being thus hallowed. This noble innovation was worthy of a people blessed with the purest form of Christianity. Europe saw, and, in all its differences of faith, must have seen with just admiration, a Queen, with her ministers, her court, the whole embodied grandeur of her government, humbly acknowledging the supremacy of Providence, and giving a national testimony to the dependence of all things

human on the might and the mercy of Heaven. I will believe, without the slightest feeling of superstition, that there was a blessing on that royal testimonial, and that the extraordinary security of the Exhibition from all the chances which were so easily conceived, and might have so easily occurred, was in the spirit of that protection which told the Israelites, that when they went up to the temple, "no man should desire their land."

The English are the reverse of a timid people; but we can well recollect the countless forms of apprehension which every day raised before the public mind—the fears of popular tumult, if multitudes were brought together; the fears of foreign conspiracy in the assemblage of strangers from all parts of a revolutionary continent, the necessity for troops to protect the metropolis, the presumed impossibility of assembling fifty thousand people in one building without riot, and the utter impossibility of controlling the riot by the civil authorities, the perils of fire and the imminent hazards of plunder, and even the danger of importing contagious disease. The presumed inadequacy of the structure itself to resist the pressure, the rush, and even the common movement of the multitudes, filled up the measure of the public alarms.

I by no means speak of those apprehensions with ridicule. They were perfectly natural. They might have all been realized, and the empire might have been plunged in sorrow by any one of those realizations. It is in no light use of the spirit of gratitude that we now thank God that they were but dreams—that six months of that perpetual hazard passed away without accident—that six millions of the people of all kingdoms thronged that splendid structure without dangerous confusion—that a mighty tide of life rolled through its floodgates from day to day without a ripple—that its treasures were untouched—that its honour was ungraded—that its rules were obeyed, and that the vastest muster of mankind, perhaps, ever assembled under one



roof (upwards of a hundred thousand in one day) in all the vividness of popular curiosity, in all the excitement of novel admiration, in all the habitual independence of Englishmen, and absolutely with no control but their own good feeling, marched through that Palace of Wonders, as if by the sound of a trumpet.

Another characteristic was the voluntary nature of the Exhibition.

We all know that magnificent structures and vast collections of opulence, in historic times, have been accumulated by human power. The Holy Scriptures have told us of the gigantic buildings of Babylon. To this day, the Pyramids are monuments of the early glories of Egypt. The Roman Amphitheatre, even in its mutilation, still attests the imperial grandeur of the Cæsars. But we have here witnessed a work raised neither by the prodigality of thrones, nor by the slavery of the people; neither stained with the tears, nor cemented with the blood, of man; neither a temple to the spirit of despotism, nor a legacy to the spirit of oppression; yet in all the substantial titles to honour, above both palace and pyramid—a great temple dedicated to the wants, the progress, and the genius of society; and the whole a suggestion of the people, a creation of the people, sustained by the people—in all its features utterly untainted by compulsion.

In its exterior displaying a new and magnificent phase of architectural science; in its material, a new and complete combination of the most useful product of the earth, with the finest product of human skill—iron and glass; and, in the security and beauty of its fabric, destined, probably, to open a new province of the noblest practical art of the world—national architecture.

But a paramount source of the interest with which I viewed the structure, was, its bearing the *impress* of the age. Our age is not simply a period of improvement, but of discovery; not of steps, but of springs; not of slowly filling up the valley, but of clearing the great

chasm at once, and even of bounding over difficulties where nature itself seemed to have fixed the barrier. The railroad has given us a speed on which man never even calculated—the speed of a wing. The electric telegraph has given us a rapidity of communication which man never dreamed of attributing but to thought! And where is the man who, but a twelvemonth ago, could have dreamed of covering eighteen acres with a building overtopping the loftiest trees, and that building wholly of iron and glass, and that building rivalling in stateliness the proudest erections of kingly pomp or national grandeur; nay, almost rivalling in the rapidity of its rise and its riches the finest imaginations of poetry?

“Anon, out of the earth a fabric huge  
Rose like an exhalation, with the sound  
Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet,  
Built like a temple.”

“Not Babylon,  
Nor great Alcairo, such magnificence  
Equall'd in all their glories, to enshrine  
Belus or Serapis, their gods, or seat  
Their kings, when Egypt with Assyria strove  
In wealth and luxury.”

But Milton's temple was erected on other principles than ours, which was raised for the glory of God and the good of man.

The results of the Exhibition must still be matter of conjecture; but without indulging in the exaggerated hope that it is destined to harmonise the world, there can be no doubt that it was eminently the offspring of peace, and that it could not have existed in a period of war. There can be as little doubt that its tendency must be to conciliate; that the gentle rivalry of the arts of peace is the most effective antidote to the rude rivalry of war; that if the distant sight of the prosperity of nations is often a source of jealousy, the nearer sight of its causes is a source of friendship; that association is, in itself, a mean of smoothing down the asperities of national prejudices—the gentle current that rounds the pebble, not the torrent that tears away



the shore ; and that, to witness the talents and virtues even of an enemy, is an advance towards the hallowed conviction, that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth."

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Providence, as if to urge the intercourse of mankind, has fixed in different regions of the globe the products necessary to human comfort ; and has even made the chief improvements of society dependent on that intercourse. What advantages may we not have thrown away by disregarding that principle ! China, a thousand years ago, possessed the mariner's compass, gunpowder, and printing ; three arts which, since their re-invention in Europe, have changed the face of society. How much was lost to human progress in those thousand years ! Yet from China we borrowed only silk.

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It is remarkable that the mechanical arts seem capable of perpetual advance ; while the works of intellectual elegance, elevation, and loveliness, arrive at a sudden limit, and stand there fixed for ages. The world, in three thousand years, has seen no superior to Homer. Demosthenes is still the prince of orators. The Parthenon is still the sublime of architecture. The sculpture of Greece is still the wonder, the envy, and the imitation of mankind. In modern art, Raphael is still supreme—the head of that brilliant multitude whose rising flashed new light on Italy and Europe.

"Hesperus, that led  
The starry host, rose brightest."

Those men were rare, because intellectual delight is not a *necessity* of man. They have had their race, and a noble one ; they have shown us of what beauty, power, and delight, the human mind is capable. They are like beacons on the promontory, cheering the



mariner's night by their lonely splendour, and even throwing light on the perils of his course, yet which he never thinks of approaching. But the perpetual necessities of life demand more direct resources, more instant remedies, more continued and homelier helps on our rugged way. To provide man with better food, better dwellings, and better clothing, is the palpable intention of that mighty Master whom we serve. "The greatest happiness of the greatest number," which in politics means only confusion, but in theology means Providence, is, beyond all question, the purpose of God. And for that purpose mechanical dexterity is destined to a constant, comprehensive, and *accelerated* progression. I have no doubt whatever that mankind will yet see machinery relieving them from all the severe, dark, and disheartening labours which now degrade man himself into a machine; that posterity will at length hear no more of suffocation in mines, of the deleterious toil of the swamp, or of the perpetual fever that wastes man away in the foundry, in the poisoned air of the midnight factory, or in the unventilated hovels of cities; that machinery will have expunged from human recollection the thousand bitternesses of that unnatural and unhallowed toil which shrivels the cheek of beauty, and withers the arm of strength; which turns youth into decrepitude, makes life only a longer disease, and almost effaces the image of God from the mind of man.

In using this language, I do not give way for a moment to the absurd and *guilty* theory, that man can live, or ought to live, without labour. I remember the Scripture, "that the poor will never cease out of the land." I have before my eyes the language of the apostle, that "He who will not work, should not eat;" but my impression is, that all labour will ultimately be reduced to the healthful, happy, and prosperous labour of the field; that agriculture will be the great occupation of mankind, while machinery does the essential drudgery of earth, and that the employment of man will

be, like that of his great ancestor, "to dress the garden, and keep it."

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For us, one fortunate result of the Exhibition will be the knowledge of foreign inventions. It has become proverbial, that "the English artificer does not *invent*, but *improves*." But the proverb is no real charge against English ingenuity. Life is too difficult in this country to allow of the waste of time. The pursuit of invention must be left to minds at ease, or the dwellers in a cheap country. The chief inventions in mechanism have been due to amateurs, to whom time was of no importance; or to foreigners, to whom the dearness of subsistence was no pressure.

It is here that governments might interfere with national advantage. Why not offer premiums for every *desideratum* of the necessary arts? Why not propose a thousand pounds for the discovery of tannin? Why not a thousand, or ten thousand, for the perfection of the steam plough? Even our incessant intercourse with America had left us ignorant of her possessing a machine which, by its rapidity of work, may save whole harvests in our uncertain climate. She has given to our ship-building a *new* model, after our practice of five hundred years. She may have other inventions, or the rudiments of inventions, which, in the hands of British skill, might be gifts to the progress of mankind. If the Exhibition had done nothing else, it would have done a great good by teaching us to inquire.\*

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The Great Industrial Exhibition is now come to a

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\* The Marquis of Worcester was the *real* inventor of the steam-engine; a country clergyman was the inventor of the power-loom; another country clergyman was the inventor of the percussion lock; the man who has baffled our Bramahs is said to be an amateur; Lord Stanhope first set a steam-boat afloat; Arkwright, the inventor of the spinning-jenny, was said to have run the hazard of poverty by neglecting his trade for his speculation. The celebrated Watt was an improver, *not* an inventor.



natural end ; but the structure stands till next year. The public feeling would see its demolition with reluctance. Why should it not receive a still more elevating exhibition ? We are about to build a National Gallery at the cost of, perhaps, a hundred thousand pounds. Why should not this structure be the substitute ? I would go further, and ask, why should it not be offered to our artists, who now complain of want of space in the yearly exhibition ? Why should it not be offered to the fine arts of all the world ? Why should not England summon the painters, sculptors, and architects of Europe, and of the earth, to send their works to this structure ? A slight share in the revenue of that display would bring together all the *chefs d'œuvre* of the globe. This use of the structure would have the eminent advantage of rendering London the metropolis of the universal arts, of giving the finest embellishment to the capital, of enriching the public taste, of softening the feelings of strangers, and, above all, of giving the civilized world a genial, a vivid, and permanent interest in the peace of England.

A fortunate result for the foreigner may be, to have taken a lesson from the aspect of England. To see the tranquillity of the national life, the supremacy of law, the absence of all oppression in the exercise of authority, and of all turbulence in the freedom of the people ; a government without suspicion, and a people without conspiracy ; the rights of property acknowledged without dependence ; loyalty unstained by servility ; public vigilance without espionage ; public justice without even a surmise of corruption ; a press, exerting the fullest privilege of opinion, yet obedient to the law ; a religion pure without austerity ; and a Church, whose sole power is in the hearts of the people—To have thus before them, at a glance, the whole theory of national peace realized, must largely dispose them to cultivate the true sources of national prosperity.

To the sovereigns of Europe it may be equally fortunate to see the Sovereign of England receiving all

the honours of royalty, yet enjoying all the security of domestic life ; with no escort but the affections of her subjects, and no pomp but the willing homage of her empire.

It will be the most important lesson of all, if both kings and subjects shall be taught, by this combination of illustrious principles and unrivalled practice, the true sources of national greatness ; if mankind shall learn that pure religion is the only fount of public virtue, and that public virtue is the only security of nations ; and that thus has England grown from a Norman vassal into the possession of boundless dominion—from an island into an empire, that everywhere touches the circumference of the globe.

In this general view of the noblest commemoration of the arts and intelligence of man ever given to the world, it would be ingratitude to omit altogether the mention of that illustrious personage to whom its origin is due. Without stooping the pulpit to adulation, it is simply justice to acknowledge, in this instance, the merits of a prince naturalized among us by even more than his royal alliance, by an English heart, directed to the well-being of the population, and thus to the true glory of England.